

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 MEXICO 03763 080206Z

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION WASHDC

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1537

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 3763

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OGEN, MX

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RE AMERICAN CEMETARY

REFS: (A) MEXICO 3608 (B) ABMC WO 1491

1. I SPOKE PERSONALLY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RABASA LAST NIGHT AND FOUND HIM FRIENDLY BUT ADAMANT ON THIS MATTER, MAINTAINING THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTED GALLASTEGUI AND ROSENZWEIG AS TO HIS POSITION AND ASKED WHETHER WE HAD NOT SPOKEN. I TOLD HIM THAT I HAD INDEED SPOKEN TO GALLASTEGUI/ROSENZWEIG BUT HAD FOUND THE POSITION AS ENUNCIATED BY THEM TO BE SO LACKING IN CHIVALRY THAT I HAD DISCONTINUED THE CONVERSATION, PREFERRING TO PURSUE IT DIRECTLY WITH HIM.

2. AFTER SOME CONVERSATION, RABASA THEN REITERATED THAT THE MEXICAN CONSTITUTION PROHIBITED A FOREIGN POWER FROM OWNING PROPERTY FOR ANYTHING OTHER THAN EMBASSIES PREMISES, THAT HE FOUND IT POLITICALLY INEXPEDIENT TO PURSUE THE "FICTIONAL" OWNERSHIP BY THE GOVERNMENT WHICH I PROPOSED. AS WE FOUND THE PRESENT AMERICAN CIVIL CEMETARY UNSUITABLE FOR THIS PURPOSE, HE THEN PROPOSED THE FOLLOWING VARIATION: THE EMBASSY SETTLE WITH THE FEDERAL DISTRICT ON A MUTUALLY  
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PAGE 02 MEXICO 03763 080206Z

AGREEABLE COMPENSATION FOR PRESENT CEMETARY; THIS MONEY IN TURN BE "GIVEN" TO THE AMERICAN BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

(OWNERS OF CIVIL CEMETARY) FOR IT TO "PURCHASE" FROM FEDERAL DISTRICT ONE OF TWO PLOTS OF LAND WHICH IT HAD OFFERED THE BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION. REMAINS COULD THEN BE TRANSFERRED AND THE NEW CEMETARY OPERATED BY THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY UNDER GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION OF AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION IN WASHINGTON. ABOVE ALL, HE WANTED NO DIRECT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOM AND ABMC BUT MIGHT BE PREPARED TO STRETCH HIS RESERVATIONS TO PERMIT CEMETARY TO RETAIN ITS PRESENT NAME OF AMERICAN NATIONAL CEMETARY. HE THEN SAID HE WOULD FURTHER INSTRUCT THE FEDERAL DISTRICT TO ASSIST IN PLANTING, LANDSCAPING, ETC., IN AN UNPUBLICIZED MANNER, EVEN IF THIS REQUIRED HIS FOREIGN MINISTRY TO PROVIDE SOME OF THE FUNDS COVERTLY AND THAT THE WHOLE OPERATION BE CONDUCTED IN AN UNPUBLICIZED MANNER.

3. I TOLD RABASA THAT I WOULD TRANSMIT HIS VIEWS TO WASHINGTON. HOWEVER, I WARNED THAT I CONSIDERED IT UNSEEMLY THAT ANY OPERATION INVOLVING AMERICAN WAR DEAD BE CARRIED OUT IN A STEALTHY, ALMOST CLANDESTINE MANNER. IF SOME SUCH TRANSFER WERE AGREED UPON AND WORKED OUT, IT SHOULD BE EFFECTED WITH DIGNITY AND EVEN, CONCEIVABLY, MILITARY HONORS. THE U.S. EMBASSY, FOR ITS PART, IS HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MEXICAN CEREMONIES MARKING THE BATTLE OF VERACRUZ AND THE BOY HEROES OF CHAPULTEPEC, AS WE CONSIDERED THAT MUTUAL RESPECT FOR OUR DEAD IN PAST CONFLICTS BROUGHT US TOGETHER TODAY AND RECOMMENDED A SIMILAR ATTITUDE ON THE MEXICAN'S PART. THE MINISTER POINTED OUT THAT WE HAD BEEN THE VICTORS AND THUS OUR POSITION WAS DIFFERENT. HE RECALLED THAT PRESIDENT TRUMAN HAD LAID A WREATH ON THE MONUMENT OF THE BOY HEROES BUT THAT HIS WREATH HAD BEEN THROWN OVER THE WALL OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY DURING THE NIGHT AND THIS SHOWED THE DEPTH OF FEELING WHICH STILL EXISTS IN MEXICO IN REGARD TO AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN THE LAST CENTURY. IN THE EYES OF THE MEXICAN PEOPLE, "THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS HAD BEEN THE RAPERS OF MEXICAN WOMEN" AND HE ASSURED ME WE ARE  
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PAGE 03 MEXICO 03763 080206Z

ASKING FOR TROUBLE ON THIS EMOTIONAL ISSUE. AT THE SAME TIME, HE BACKED DOWN TO THE EXTENT OF AFFIRMING THAT ANY TRANSFER OF REMAINS SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT DECOROUSLY AND WITH THE COLLABORATION OF MEXICAN AUTHORITIES, EVEN IF PUBLICIZED CEREMONIES WERE NOT HELD.

4. COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT WE HAVE FOUR POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION OPEN TO US: (A) A NEW CEMETARY WITH TITLE IN THE NAME OF THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT AND WITH ARRANGEMENTS FOR PERMANENT USE -- UNDER PRESENT CIRCUM-

STANCES WE BELIEVE THAT THIS DOOR HAS BEEN IN EFFECT  
CLOSED TO US AND I DOUBT WHETHER IT COULD BE DONE EVEN  
BY A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE; (B) A NEW CEMETARY,  
THE LAND TO BE HELD IN THE NAME OF THE AMERICAN BENEVOLENT  
SOCIETY WHICH WOULD SERVE AS A FRONT FOR OWNERSHIP OF  
A SUITABLE PLOT OF LAND. THIS IS NOT TOO DISSIMILAR  
FROM THE DE FACTO SITUATION OF THE FRENCH GRAVES AS  
DESCRIBED BY THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR (MEXICO 3608) AND  
ARRANGMENTS COULD PROBABLY BE MADE FOR ABMC TO EXERCISE  
SUPERVISION THROUGH THE FRONT OF THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY;  
(C) KEEP THE CEMETARY WHERE IT IS, REGARDLESS OF THE FACT  
THAT IT WOULD BE NARROWER AND LESS AESTHETIC. THIS  
WOULD HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF CONTINUITY SINCE IT WAS  
FOUNDED IN 1851 AND THERE WOULD BE NO QUESTION OF  
OWNERSHIP, NO QUESTION OF NAME CHANGE, NO QUESTION OF  
CHANGING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE AMERICAN BATTLE  
MONUMENTS COMMISSION AND MOST IMPORTANT IT WOULD AVOID MAKING  
A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE OF THE MATTER; (D) REMOVE THE REMAINS  
TO THE U.S. AS GENERAL ADAMS POINTED OUT, THIS SEEMS THE LAST  
RESORT OPTION, INTERRUPTING A 125-YEAR-OLD TRADITION AND ALSO  
OPEN TO POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS BOTH IN MEXICAN AND U.S. PUBLIC  
OPINION.

WTM ACTION REQUESTED: THE DEPARTMENT IS REQUESTED TO  
CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES WITH THE ABMC, ALONG THE  
LINES OF (A), (B), AND (C) IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT  
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